Background Statement John McCullagh

1/30/17

When I was in elementary school, my only expectation was to have fun every day when I came to school. It was not a very well thought out expectations but at the time having fun was the only thing I wanted to do. I just came off of five years of being at home playing with my parents and siblings. If I were going to go to school, I wanted it to be equally fun. As I progressed on to middle school, I wanted more freedom and more choices from the school. Because I was older now I wanted to be treated as such. When I hit high school, my expectations shifted back a bit but I adopted some new things as well. Once again, I wanted to have fun. I wanted this because it was possibly the last step in my schooling if I decided not to go to college. The expectation I adopted was to be challenged more academically as well as with options for sports or afterschool activities. If it were going to be my last four years than I wanted to experience as much as possible.

My dad always wanted me to be at school and not miss any days. My mom was the same way for a long time too. Eventually, they noticed how much I would love to be at school and would try to go even I were sick. They were so proud of me that if I wanted to take a day off every now and then, they would let me as a reward. They knew that I probably wouldn’t ever take it and they were right. School was too much fun and I think they saw that. They never needed to tell me to do homework or work on projects because they knew that I wanted to succeed in those classes. If I didn’t do well in a class my dad will tell me to get in gear and focus to make sure that I pass every class. As a whole my parents were more worried with my other siblings when it came to school because they didn’t like it nearly as much as I did.

It wasn’t until high school that I ever gave any thought to life after my education was complete. In elementary and middle school, I didn’t every think past the next day of school. In Old Town when I got into high school, there aren’t too many businesses around that worry about your education. The Old Town businesses were all small and didn’t require any education for employment. Even in the towns outside of Old Town there aren’t too many options that care about what education you have. If we look all over the world however, some intro jobs require at least a bachelor in order to receive employment. A bachelor’s degree years ago used to be worth a lot more. Now it’s sometimes only good for getting a higher education.

My expectations for classes pretty much ended at if the teacher could relate to the students in some way. It wasn’t until high school that I met a teacher that I didn’t like that seemed to rub everyone the wrong way. It seemed like she was just there to collect the pay check and didn’t have any regard for students that learned a different way and didn’t adjust whatsoever to those students. I just barely passed that class because I never once looked forward to being there. My classes were almost always set up as rows of desks. I didn’t really care for it but I didn’t have anything against it. In grade school, whatever worked for the teacher was what worked for me.

When I was younger the teachers were more concerned with making it fun and interactive. The older I got however the less that seemed to happen. There were a few classes here and there that would make it fun and interesting but for the most part, it was teachers lecturing for the whole class. That was mostly in high school. Whenever I did have a really awesome teacher, everyone liked them. They knew how to engage students and make the time fly by so fast that you wished it were more. Those classes were just as fun as gym was in elementary school for me. The constant engage while at the same time being able to connect to each student individually was how all the best teachers did it.

Whenever a teacher lectured for the whole class period every single day, no one liked that. I especially had a hard time staying awake. The only thing that got me through those classes were the classes afterwards that were fun and exciting. As I said early, being constantly engaged and never knowing when you’re going to have your opportunity to share your thoughts to the teacher and the class was enough to keep me excited and on my toes for the whole period. I think for most people in middle school, it was Mr. Jay that stole the show. He was the English teacher that set the bar high. Students looked up to him and craved his attention and approval. A good job from Mr. Jay would make your day because you knew that he truly meant it. I was never the biggest fan of English classes but he had a variety of projects and the classes were planned in a way to always keep students engaged. He was easily the most memorable teacher around.

Being in the Old Town, Maine school system, it was always dominantly white among the student body. I also remember not caring about if a student came from a rich or poor family or if they were a different race. From the beginning of my education I was surrounded my different religions and races. While white was the majority, I got to meet people from around the world.

Trying to remember what the programs and classes were like back in grade is a struggle for me. It was 6 or 7 years ago that I was in high school and since then, I have subbed in different schools with different programs and classes and they all blend together in my mind. I think the fact that they don’t stick out in my mind means that they didn’t leave a lasting impression in my mind. I remember we didn’t have a variety of classes that were available like I have seen in other schools and we stuck mostly to the core classes. It definitely wasn’t anything special in my mind. It was mostly the music programs and sports that kept my interest in school.

I always took music classes. I played trombone and I excelled in all of my classes with it. The program was top notch and we always won competitions in New England wherever we went. All of my other core classes I would say that I got an average education with a few exceptions. The education I got in music however was substantially above average. When people talk about Old Town, it’s always the music program that they are known for.

I think it is perfectly okay that I had an average grade school education. I think this because I also had those few teachers that really stood out as role models for my own future. For a long time, I had no clue that I wanted to be a teacher until I was responsible for them at a summer camp and realized that I was really good at it. I saw teachers that inspired me and I saw teachers that could put me to sleep. As a soon to be teacher, I can take both of those experiences to inform how I teach my future students.

I want to be a teacher because I think I can make strong connections with students. I was always able to relate to them and more than that, I was always able to make them laugh while teaching them something meaningful. The more I teach in schools, the more I see how good I am at it. I have only gotten better since pursuing this career and I have a drive to only become better as time goes on. Being a health teacher is something that comes naturally to me because I know how to make those awkward topics and turn them into something meaningful. My strong connection to the content is what makes it so fun for me to teach and for students to understand.

All of the teachers I have seen that who are exceptional to say the least, know how to engage each student in the classroom. They aren’t afraid to do some learning on their own. It may not be about the content area but they are constantly learning about their students and what makes the tick as well as what makes them work to the best of their ability. They can draw out what makes that student great and find what encourages them to take part in their class in a meaningful way. I have already started this process of learning about all of my students either through MI survey or simple observations and conversations. For me it is as simple as asking how each student is doing every now and then that makes that connection with them.

As a health teacher, I hope to always be able to practice what I preach and be that role model for the students. I want to gain the students respect and trust so that when they come into class they feel comfortable and when they leave the class they leave more prepared for the world than when they came in. If I can pull that off, then that’ll be all I need.

I want to always advocate for student health. If we can teach the students and inspire them to lead healthy lives, then that will inspire generation after generation to do the same because they will see the benefits. I think it starts with making sure that all the teachers, not just the health teacher, advocates for health in schools. I can talk all day about being healthy but convincing other teachers in the school or schools around the country to do the same even if they aren’t a health teacher will make a huge difference.

I don’t really have any concerns or questions about the profession but my only fear is that I know I probably won’t be able to reach every single student that comes through my class. Every student is different and who knows if I can convince all of them about the benefits of health. By the time the reach my high school health class, their heads may already be full of other habits they learned from past teachers, fellow students, or even their parents. There is so much to consider outside of my own health class that influences all of my students. That’s a scary thought to me.